

Corrections center, instead

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of new jail, proposed

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Sullivan County Jail
Superintendent Ross
Cunningham has
proposed building a
\$4.2 million commu-
nity corrections center instead of
a new \$44 million jail that had
garnered little support.

"This plan will probably give us
a five-year window," Cunningham
said. "But there still needs to be
upgrades at the jail."

The proposal is to construct a
new facility near the existing jail
in Unity that would provide treat-
ment and transitional services for
inmates and ease overcrowding.

"The goal is to provide a secure
program that focuses on the

inmate's successful transition
back to the community,"
Cunningham said.

If approved, the new 10,000-
square-foot facility would house
44 inmates and be of residential-
grade construction. Both male
and female inmates would be
housed with treatment targeted
for each gender.

"The initial program was \$44

million and nobody bought into
that," Commissioner Ben Nelson
said. "Frankly, it was just too
expensive for the taxpayer."

Inmates sentenced to a drug or
alcohol treatment program are
currently sent out of the county to
centers throughout the state.
With the new facility, all treat-
ment will be done at the center.

"With this program it is our

people who we take care of,"
Sheriff Michael Prozzo said.
"We'll have everything here. It's
one-stop shopping."

Inmates currently sent out for
treatment may have to be trans-
ported as far away as a two and a
half-hour drive to attend a 28-day
treatment program. If the new
center is built, inmates will

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attend an in-house 90-day pro-
gram.

According to Cunningham,
the longer program will help
reduce recidivism among the
inmate population.

"One study indicates that
over 80 percent of the inmates
were in need of treatment,"
Cunningham said.

If built, inmates will partici-
pate in a program split into two
phases. The first will develop an
initial education and treatment
plan followed by intensive edu-
cation classes and decision-
making programs.

The second phase will transi-
tion inmates back into the com-
munity through work release
supported by community-based
agencies.

Inmates will also be expected
to pay a portion of their income
to offset costs associated with
housing them.

According to Nelson, the cost
to house an inmate is \$63 per
day.

The new center would
require hiring six additional
correctional officers at an annu-
al cost of \$420,000, according to
Cunningham.

"We're basically talking
about a 90-day treatment pro-
gram," Cunningham said. "I
plan to work with the courts
and the county attorney to
make this work."

After Cunningham's presen-
tation, the commission voted to
support the proposal.

"I don't know if there's ever a

good time to spend money like
this," Commissioner Jeff
Barrette said. "But I will throw
my endorsement to this."

Cunningham will present his
proposal to the executive
finance committee Friday and
seek its support.

In addition to the \$4.2 mil-
lion for the project,
Cunningham is also seeking
about \$1 million for improve-
ments to the jail including
sprinkler system and fire alarm
updates, outdoor recreation
areas, a new roof, security sys-
tem upgrades and a new heat-
ing system.

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